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Two Issues at the CIA: Layoffs, 'Prior Review'

In his criticism of Frank Snepp's book, "Decent Interval," nowhere does Adm. Stansfield Turner deny the allegations or substance of Mr. Snepp's thesis ["The CIA's 'Unequivocal' Right of Prior Review," op-ed, Dec. 7]. However, his criticism is "justifiably" aimed at Mr. Snepp's violation of his oath. I would agree with Adm. Turner that the right to review any work prior to publication is absolutely necessary for national-security considerations. However, a public that has been beset by a Watergate, MKULTRA, and other calamities could reasonably be suspect of the neutral detachment of the CIA reviewers in their application of national-security considerations in the censorship of such works as "Decent Interval." This is in no way an imputation that the CIA would intentionally cover-up its role in the chaotic climax of the Vietnam affair, but the very nature of the organization and the sporadic nuances of former employees gives rise to a natural concern on the part of the public as to the impartiality of those who would conduct this "censorship" for us.

A permanent citizens panel (with proper clearances) could act as a buffer between the CIA's desire to unilaterally censor and the right of the people to know the truth. Each side could present its case, and the committee would make the decision, with judicial remedies as a last resort. Unquestionably there are secrets that must be kept, but how is the public to know that concerns other than national security haven't been interjected?

As a former Army officer with two tours in Vietnam, I would be very much interested in the analysis of the final demise of the Saigon government. While I would condemn Mr. Snepp for violating his oath, on the other hand, were I to run up against the opposition to which he alluded during numerous interviews, I might see the whole affair in a different light.

DAVID J. BISSELL

Falls Church

I thought Adm. Turner stated his case quite well regarding the right of prior review. He expressed "deep confidence in the loyalty and patriotism of the persons who have worked for us."

Isn't loyalty a two-way street?

ROBERT C. PENISTON

Washington

The massive layoffs over at CIA somehow don't seem to jibe with the tradition of fair play governing our civil service. The style is, well, down-right Stalinist. The story of the chief of station who served on a panel to select other supergrade officers for termination and who was himself then terminated by the other panel members after returning to his overseas post reminded one of how Stalin appointed Comrade Yezhov to shorten NKVD Chief Yagoda "by a head," and then called on Beria to get rid of Yezhov.

Your reporting of Adm. Turner's purge of CIA operations officers was so extensive that I was struck by one large piece missing from the Byzantine puzzle: President Carter's role.

When several hundred of our highest calibre, most dedicated civil servants are summarily fired, the public has the right to know not only what is going on but *why*.

AUSTIN GOODRICH

Great Falls, Va.

Stansfield Turner's article on the CIA fails to recognize that 1) there are limits to what oaths an official may properly require as a condition for public employment, 2) a secret agency cannot in a democracy be its own judge of what to tell the public, and 3) I, for one, am very unhappy that I don't know if the CIA is limiting itself now to intelligence and has discontinued interfering in foreign political and economic activities.

As Turner says he wants a better balance between secrecy and oversight, I suggest that 1) the CIA replace its arbitrary overall secrecy oath with an oath confined to certain critical and proper agency activities, 2) a congressional oversight committee exercise the prior review of writings of ex-CIA employees, and 3) the President assure us that the CIA has given up activist interference and tell us what adequate oversight is in effect.

ALLAN F. MATTHEWS

McLean

There is an issue in the mass Central Intelligence Agency firings that has been overlooked—namely, age discrimination in employment. A CIA spokesman touched upon it, perhaps unwittingly, when he said that part of the purpose of the mass firings was to open up positions for younger officers. The spokesman must obviously not be familiar with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which makes it illegal "to fail or refuse to hire, or to discharge, or otherwise discriminate against any individual as to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of age." The law covers virtually all men and women between the ages of 40 and 65 in private industry and most of government.

CIA claims that under provisions of the 1947 National Security Act, its director has unlimited authority to fire employees. Perhaps. But experts in the field of age-discrimination law say privately that this issue might be profitably explored by those CIA employees over age 40 who were fired—and there is reason to believe that the majority are over 40. Failing a victory by these individuals in the courts, Congress might well reexamine the 1947 legislation.

The CIA men and women have an opportunity—because of the publicity potential of their cause—to make a major contribution to the elimination of a form of discrimination that is pervasive, brutal, stupid and costly in both economical and psychological terms.

PETER CHEW

Washington

It's a damned shame that certain former employees of the intelligence community feel that they can openly disregard their promises and solemn oaths and flaunt the security of the nation.

JUSTIN R. SWIFT

Washington

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